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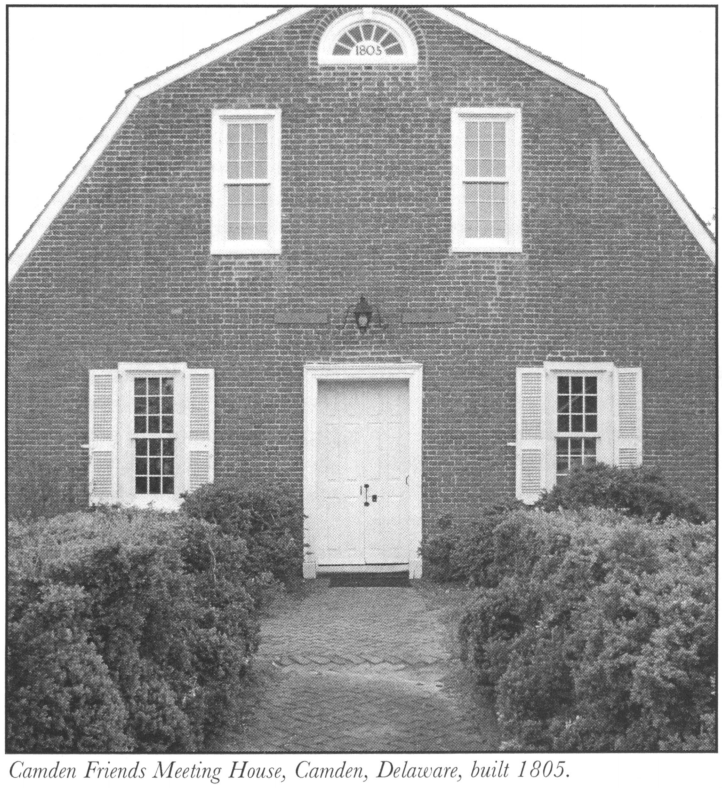
For the Members of the Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture at Salisbury University

Kent County, Delaware: Quaker Influences on Slavery

by Denise A. Horner

At the time of the American Revolution, slavery had existed in Delaware, then known as the three lower counties of Pennsylvania, for almost 200 years. Colonial wills refer to the inheriting of slaves, but only rarely to liberating them. An old and trusted slave might be freed to live out his or her life the best way possible. John Maffet, a Kent County planter, freed his slave Blanch in 1785, but he claimed that her children should remain a part of his estate, and any children that she might later have would be given to his son Archibald. An old slave might be taken care of, though not freed. A Kent County farmer, Nicholas Loockerman, said of his old slave 'wench' Hagar: "[she] should not be put to hard labor, but … spend the remainder of her life in quiet." Hagar would remain a slave of his grandson Vincent Loockerman.



Camden Friends Meeting House, Camden, Delaware, built 1805.

Slaves could be freed for length of service as well as for religious sentiments. A slave might be granted freedom upon turning 18 (for a female) or 21 (for a male), or after an arbitrary number of years, such as six or seven. Letitia, a mulatto slave owned by Nicholas Loockerman and passed to his grandson Vincent, was to be freed when she turned 40. Thomas Irons, a Kent County landowner, in 1785 ordered his slave Cato to be set free seven years after his owner's death, though Irons granted another of his slaves, Charles, his immediate freedom plus a cow, a calf and a quarter acre of land on which to build a house and use for his natural life.

In the years during and after the Revolution, manumissions in Kent County occurred at a record pace, largely due to the influence of the Society of Friends (Quakers). A Colonial farmer might own farm implements, seed and feed, and livestock in addition to sundry pans, kettles and pots, beds and bedclothes, and guns, as well as his house and land. Slaves were property too and could be inventoried and passed from one generation to the next. An average male slave between the ages of 16 and 34 cost his master $150, a $20 yoke of oxen and a dollar an acre of land. As freeing slaves meant whittling away the inheritance a landowner's children expected upon his death, the Quakers were willing to sacrifice a great deal to free a slave or even several slaves at a time.

Quaker brothers Govey and Jonathan Emerson were Kent County, DE, farmers as well as slaveholders who eventually embraced their sect's sentiments opposing slavery. Being "weak of body" in 1773, Govey willed that each of his slaves at the age of 21 after being taught to read should be set free. On being freed, York, the eldest, then Rose, London, Ezekial, Phebe, Zilpha, Alce, Sarah and Rachel were to be carefully provided for with a warm set of work clothes. Govey used his land as security to the province of Delaware for the ex-slaves' maintenance.

Jonathan Emerson, also "weak in body," made his will in 1784, giving his trustees the power, along with his wife Ruth (Bowers), to settle all of his estate, both real and personal "in accordance with the principles of the People called the Quakers."

In his will, Jonathan wrote: "… in times of Ignorance I became so far a captive to corrupt custom as influenced thereby to sell a Negro Woman called Phillis for a Slave whose release I have been since much concerned about … ." Now he ordered his executors and trustees to pay whatever it cost to redeem Phillis and her children and grandchildren in 'thralldom' and to set her free. He further intended to make restitution to her and her descendants for their time spent in bondage to the Emerson family. As "Fili" meant "losing one's way" in Mandingo, the African tribal tongue, the like-sounding English name Phillis (or Fillis) became a very common Delaware slave name, possibly chosen by African girls themselves, a fitting commentary on the whole nature of slave life: "losing one's way."

Jonathan willed money to Andrew, manumitted as an old man, for the years he worked as a slave after reaching the age of 21. He ordered his trustees to give to one of his slaves, Absolom, "what may be reasonable for his support." He provided money to a Negro woman, Sidney, born and raised in his father's family, and to the family of a Negro man named Weymouth, also raised

by his father, but who was then deceased. Catherine, a slave who died in the possession of Jonathan's father-in-law John Bowers had a brother, Richard. Jonathan paid Richard the money that would have been Catherine's had she still been alive to enable Richard to buy his freedom. John Bowers, himself, was one of the three witnesses to the will.

What influenced Govey Emerson to free his slaves and Jonathan Emerson to not only buy his slaves out of bondage, but also to pay them for the time they had worked for him? Certain Quaker influences stand out to explain their magnanimity. In 1758, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends, to which the Delaware Quakers belonged, declared itself opposed to the slave trade and later even to slaveholding. First it was recommended that all Friends free their slaves, and then in 1776, the Yearly Meeting made it mandatory.

Internationally known abolitionist Warner Mifflin of Camden, Kent County, DE, was owner of 2,000 acres of farmland and was the Emerson's friend. Moved in 1759 by what the Quakers called the Inner Light, Warner later said about a slave that he "found an uneasiness in my mind … till I purchased him to manumit and set him at Liberty …" and once visited with U.S. President George Washington about his freeing all slaves. At age 14, in Accomack County, VA, while Warner worked alongside his father's slaves in the field, they asked him why they should support him and later have their children support his children. His answer is unrecorded, but in 1767, after he had married and moved to Delaware, he freed his 37 slaves, even paying his ex-slaves for their labor while in bondage to him, as his Quaker friend Jonathan Emerson later did in his 1784 will. Warner also induced his father in 1775 to free his 100 slaves.

In January 1783, Kent County Friend Robert George bought back and freed a slave named Benjamin whom his wife had sold when she was a young girl. Another Friend, Mary Hastings, proposed she would do all "in her power to free any slave who came to her through her late husband" and she would "take and discharge them according to the rules of Friends."

Several Friends of Kent County, opposed to slavery, visited recalcitrant members of the Society who kept slaves, earnestly entreating them to free their slaves or be disowned. After months of "treating with them," Friends could not persuade Sarah Rasin and her children from keeping slaves, so these members were disowned, as was a Joseph Rasin in 1793. Mary Rasin (relationship to Sarah and Joseph unknown), in contrast, freed a number of slaves in 1780.

Occasionally, paying former slaves for the time they had labored backfired. Thomas Nock, a Kent County Quaker, in his early 1780s will provided for his former slaves whom he had previously freed. Sarah, George, Mingo, Jonathan, Dinbigh and Elizabeth, however, were far from humble and grateful according to William H. Williams in his book *Slavery and Freedom in Delaware 1639-1865*. At the Quakers' Duck Creek Meeting, these ex-slaves demanded compensation for their time in bondage to the sum of 100 pounds.

Matthew Lowber Sr., a Kent County farmer, disregarded the aversion to slaveholding held by some of his Quaker neighbors. Though witnessed and affirmed by two Quakers, Lowber's 1772 will simply divided up his slaves among five of his six children. William, his son-in-law, retained the three slaves he already possessed. A granddaughter, Elizabeth, William's daughter, was given a black girl, Celia. Matthew's son, Matthew Jr., received two parcels of land and the slaves Glasco and Lis. His brothers Peter and Jonathan, in addition to inheriting land, split six slaves evenly between them. Their sister Elizabeth got three slaves, Patient, Phebee and Hampshire, in addition to two cows and calves, one bed and furniture, and a good side saddle she already owned.

The Quakers, as an integral part of the country's population, generally recognized the essential humanity of all peoples and took action to free, compensate and even to secure a happier future for their former slaves. Though not all Quakers followed the guidelines of their sect, many Quakers proselytized their revulsion to slaveholding and slave trading. Some worked diligently to encourage other members to free and reward their slaves for their years of service, sometimes having success and at other times not. However, the Quakers' efforts were just the beginning of an anti-slavery movement. In 1775, Quakers in nearby Philadelphia founded the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, the nation's first abolition society; from this organization grew the new nation's abolitionist movement.

Denise Horner, a Somerset County native with a life-long interest in writing, currently is a receptionist and Reading Room assistant at the Nabb Research Center.

Pictured are a small sampling of the holiday postcards from the "'Tis the Season: Vintage Postcards in American Memory" exhibit in the Nabb Gallery through December 17.

Wetipquin Through The Eyes of Edward Taylor

By Alexandra Reyes

On September 18, 2010, the Nabb Research Center hosted "Wetipquin," a discussion with local author Edward T. Taylor. During the talk, Taylor detailed his humble beginnings growing up in a small Eastern Shore village. "Laid in waste, mangled by trees, just sad to drive through" is the way Taylor described the current Wetipquin village environment.

Wetipquin, an Indian word for "wetland," is also the name of the small rural area of Wicomico County in which Taylor grew up and where, as he said "everyone knew everyone else." "Wetipquin had love," recalled Taylor, "even the town drunk would put his bottle away and go to church on Sunday; everybody wanted to do and be good. Not like the negativity one sees today."

Edward Taylor and his wife Doretta.

Taylor proudly proclaimed that Wetipquin locals were among Wicomico's most productive citizens due to the fact that every family worked hard and that most were able to send their children to college. Taylor explained that when he was growing up the most common work was farm work, specifically crop planting and harvesting. Taylor hoped for a job as a farmhand but was denied the position because he was too dark; his light-skinned younger brother got the job instead.

"Why were there light and dark Negros?," Taylor questioned. His father answered that a 7-foot tall boxer from outside the Eastern Shore bought land in the Wetipquin area in the 19th century and married a local girl, producing interracial children. These children continued to racially intermix for generations, causing many shades within the black community. This story and Taylor's early childhood experiences were the source of inspiration for his new book. *On Yonder's End* is the author's tale of the racial differences in Wetipquin. The book tells the story of one family's struggles with racial tensions inside and outside the family starting in the Civil War era and ending in the Civil Rights movement of the late 20th century.

Taylor is best known for his memoirs *Just God and Me: A Korean War Veteran Remembers* and *Up from the Strawberry Patch.* Taylor began writing his first memoir *Just God and Me: A Korean War Veteran Remembers* as a freshman at Salisbury University. Soon after he began at SU, he took a break from writing; the endeavor took 40 years to complete. "It was hard to write because I had to relive all those memories described in the book" explained Taylor.

It wasn't until his children were in their early teens that he picked up his pen again. The year 2003 marked the end of yet another long break; his daughter published her first book in that year, inspiring him to finish his own memoir. A year later, his book was published. Easier to write, *Up from the Strawberry Patch* is an account of Taylor's early childhood memories of growing up in Wetipquin.

Although Taylor infused his writing with memories of his beloved hometown, he took his writing in a new direction for his latest book. *On Yonder's End* marks the author's first foray into historical fiction writing. It should make great reading for all who have a love of the Eastern Shore and its families.

Alexandra Reyes is a communication arts major at Salisbury University interning at the Nabb Center.

News, Exhibits and Events

Nabb Center Galleries, Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1-4 p.m. or by appointment

Native Americans and First Contact on Delmarva

August 30, 2010 - May 20, 2011

The first contact with Europeans brought profound change for Native Americans and the landscape. Maps, artifacts and documents reveal the early period of exploration by Europeans and illustrate their subsequent domination of the Eastern Shore.

Faces of the Eastern Shore

August 30 - October 22

The people of the Eastern Shore have been described as independent cusses with a fierce local pride. See some of the faces that exemplify the character of the people of Delmarva, showing their spirit, way of life and legacy.

'Tis the Season: Vintage Postcards in American Memory

November 1 - December 17

Vintage postcards intrigue and amaze with the variety, sense of humor and insight they provide into the minds of the late Victorians. From the Nabb Research Center Collections, this exhibit features cards of the fall and winter holidays: Thanksgiving, Christmas and the New Year. Sometimes somber, often sentimental and frequently irreverent, these delightful cards reflect the mood of the holidays and of the era.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS, FALL 2010

"Slave Castles of Ghana": A Discussion with Salisbury University's Tonya Price and George Washington University's Lee Ann Fujii

Lecture, Nabb Center Gallery
Wednesday, October 27, 7 p.m.

Located on the west coast of Africa, Ghana was the home to ports where great slave castles held thousands of Africans destined for the new world. Price and Fujii discuss their recent trips to the area.

African-American Traditions in Voice: Slave Spirituals and Gospel Music

Concert, Wicomico Room, Guerrieri University Center
Friday, October 29, 7 p.m.

Experience African-American music traditions and learn about their histories. Featuring the Society for the Preservation of African-American Arts singers and the Salisbury University Gospel Choir.

(Continued)

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"Rebel Heels and Northern Scum: Maryland's Role in the Civil War": with Dr. Thomas Clemens

Lecture, Wicomico Room, Guerrieri University Center
Thursday, November 4, 7 p.m.
Historian Thomas G. Clemens highlights Maryland's pivotal role in our nation's most tragic conflict. This program is made possible by the Maryland Humanities Council.

"African-American Churches of the Eastern Shore": with Linda Duyer

Lecture, Nabb Center Gallery
Wednesday, December 8, 7 p.m.
Author and local historian Linda Duyer discusses vanished and surviving African-American churches of the Eastern Shore.

LOST RIVER TICKETS

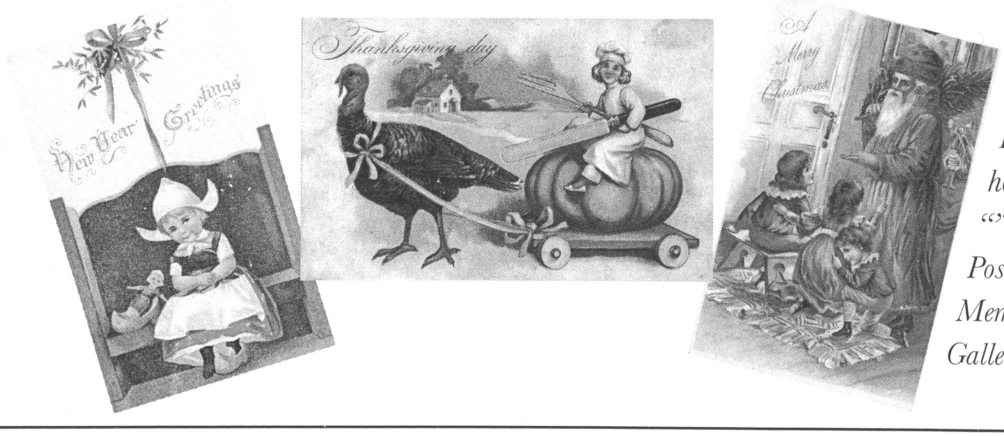
Tickets for the world movie premier of *The Lost River*, the untold story of Delmarva's own Anna Ella Carroll, being held Saturday, November 20, at Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Resort in Cambridge, MD, are available at the Nabb Research Center. Call 410-543-6312 for information

HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

Thanksgiving: November 24-28
Winter Break: December 20-January 2
Martin Luther King Jr. Day: January 17

SAVE THE DATE:

Saturday, April 30, 2011
"Victorian Springtime in Snow Hill"



Pictured are additional holiday postcards from the "'Tis the Season: Vintage Postcards in American Memory" exhibit in the Nabb Gallery through December 17.